

Challenge from the Left, 1905–1914

The Russian Revolution of 1905

BLOODY SUNDAY — 22 January 1905 — marked the beginning of the Russian revolution of 1905. On that day troops of the tsar fired on a peaceful protest march led by one Father Gapon, a police agent who was supposed to channel the despair of Russia's workers away from the tsarist government. The deaths and injuries that resulted symbolized the gap that had begun to open between Nicholas II, the "Little Father," and his people. In the months that followed, Russia, already badly strained by a losing war effort against the Japanese and the rule of an inept, archaic absolutism, was torn by rebellion. Urban workers and rural peasants, liberals and discontented intellectuals, but most importantly the navy and army, combined to protest land hunger, defeat, starvation, and the backwardness of the Russian state and society. In the end not much came of this revolution. By late 1906, the unrest had petered out as the sheer mass and inertia of governmental machinery wore down the protesters. A franchise law heavily weighted in favor of the landed and wealthy elected a parliament, the Duma, which had little power, and a few particularly offensive ministers were replaced by less incompetent men. But a promised constitution was never realized, and even the far-from-radical Duma was eventually dissolved. Fearing that any concession would spell the end of the glorious thousand-year rule of the Romanovs, Tsar Nicholas reneged on his promises and retired to safety behind the barriers of bureaucracy and loyal Cossack troops.¹

International socialists were also rocked by the events of 1905. Since Nicholas I had aided in the suppression of the revolutionaries of 1848, progressive Europe had viewed Russia as a stronghold of the arch-

conservative old order. If Russia could be so shaken, even nearly overturned by revolution, were not the hopes for socialist victory in the West much brightened? Furthermore, the Russian workers had shown the awesome potential of an old weapon, the mass strike. St. Petersburg, Moscow, and other major Russian cities had been paralyzed by a general walkout of factory and transportation workers. As early as 1893, discussion of the mass or general strike had been on the agenda of the Second International, and many times between then and 1905 such strikes in Belgium, Holland, and elsewhere had attracted the attention of socialists everywhere. But never before 1905 had the full potential of the mass strike been so graphically suggested. All of Europe's socialist parties, but especially the SPD, were gripped by a renewed and vigorous interest in the mass strike. For the SPD the debate over this weapon ended with a drastic change in the relationship between the party and the trade unions. As could be expected, Kautsky played a central role in the mass-strike debate.²

Like most non-Russian socialists, Kautsky had paid some attention to the land of the tsars before 1905, but he had not devoted a great deal of time to it. His view of Russia was that typically held by progressive Europeans in the late nineteenth century: It was an industrially backward, curiously foreign, and generally brutal country. Kautsky shared the anti-Russian prejudices of most German socialists, as evidenced by his singling out a Russian invasion as one possible justification for the formation of a broad coalition of the left in Germany. He also felt that Russia's backwardness would mean that the revolution in that country would not be a proletarian one, as it would in industrially advanced countries, but the traditional bourgeois revolution of an earlier period in western Europe. He argued that the revolution in Russia would find the proletariat leading the revolutionary intelligentsia, petite bourgeoisie, and peasantry to force their country into the modern era. He even suggested that a revolutionary element within the Russian officers corps would play an important part on the side of the revolutionaries, something he thought impossible in western Europe.³

Many of Kautsky's earliest works, including *Karl Marx's Economic Doctrines*, *Thomas More*, and *Class Struggles in France*, were translated into Russian within a year of their appearance in German. Through such works and personal contacts, Kautsky exercised a good deal of influence over the development of Russian Marxism. He also had closer personal ties with the Russian movement than did most leading figures in the SPD. During the Zurich years, Bernstein had introduced Karl to many Russian emigrés, most notably Pavel Axelrod, Vera Zasulich, and Georgi Plekhanov, three of the founders of Russian

Marxism. With Plekhanov and Axelrod, Kautsky established warm personal relations. Of all the figures in international socialism before World War I, few had more in common than Plekhanov and Kautsky. Both came from comfortable middle-class families; both had flirted with anarchism in their youth; and both ardently rejected organizational and administrative work in order to devote themselves to theory. Plekhanov held Kautsky in the highest esteem, and Kautsky frequently expressed his admiration for Plekhanov's intellectual abilities. Plekhanov and Axelrod, both of whom frequently contributed to the *Neue Zeit* and the rest of the German socialist press, were two of Kautsky's major sources of personal information on Russia and its Marxian movement.⁴

But Kautsky also had a third important source of information on Russian affairs in the brilliant Rosa Luxemburg. This remarkable young woman, born in 1871 of assimilated Jewish parents, came from the region of Poland dominated by Russia. Following her arrival on the German scene in the nineties, she became very close to the Kautsky family, especially Luise and the boys. Her relationship with Karl was at first that of respectful, but independent, student to acknowledged master; later one of equals; and finally one of icy and at times, at least on Luxemburg's side, vicious opposition. She was a harsh person who judged people in strict moralistic terms. An aggressive, effective polemicist, she had little compassion for human weakness or ignorance. She tended to overlook the possibility of honest disagreement, which she usually interpreted as personal attack or perfidy. Although Kautsky had great respect for her gifts, he also regretted her intolerance. In 1902, he observed that she was "an extraordinarily qualified woman, . . . but tact and a feeling of camaraderie are completely strange to her." The course of this interesting relationship will be followed more closely below.⁵

Kautsky's response to the 1905 revolution per se was characterized by unqualified support for the revolutionaries, cautions against overreliance on apparent liberal support, and sharp disagreement with the analysis of the revolution presented by the party leadership in the *Vorwärts*. In his first article on the revolution, he hailed the actions of the proletarian revolutionaries, but warned that even the cooperation of Russian liberals, like the leading figures of the *zemstvo* movement, would not win the revolution support from other European nations. He argued that because the workers had been the key to the first phase of the revolution, they had to expect that the European bourgeoisie, and eventually the Russian liberals also, would side with the tsarist government. Kautsky urged the French workers (this article appeared

in a French socialist journal as well as in the *Neue Zeit*) to pressure their government not to aid the tsarist forces.⁶

The question of the role to be played by the Russian peasantry in the activities of 1905 provided material for the first of two major criticisms of the *Vorwärts* by Kautsky. The official party daily gave a great deal of coverage to events in Russia, most of it favorable to all factions of the revolutionaries. The *Vorwärts*, and other SPD journals as well, collected funds to support revolutionary activities and generally gave moral support to people they clearly perceived as enemies of the hated and feared tsarist state. Kautsky was in complete sympathy with these efforts. However, when the *Vorwärts* tried to predict what role the peasants would play in Russia, he dissented vigorously. This created a curious situation in which the man who for so long argued so ardently against the notion of a revolutionary potential among Germany's peasantry now argued just as strongly in favor of such a potential among the Russian peasantry. But this affair also reveals how flexible and subtle Kautsky could be in his analysis of events in different countries, and it further reveals his sensitivity, within the context of his materialist conception of history, to the variable course of development.⁷

Relying heavily on a liberal contributor from Moscow, a *Vorwärts* article predicted that the Russian ruling clique would foment peasant rebellion against the revolutionary intelligentsia in order to split the latter from its liberal allies, thereby weakening the forces of revolution. Kautsky faulted this analysis on three points. First, he argued that the assumption that the peasants would automatically turn against the student portion of the revolutionary intelligentsia, as had happened during the early 1870s in the "going to the people" phase of Russian populism, was false. During the earlier period the students had had few connections with the lower classes, either peasants or workers, but by 1905 that had changed. The students had established contacts with the workers, who in turn remained in touch with their home villages, thus serving as liaison between peasants and students. In the earlier period the students had been perceived as part of a privileged elite; now the peasantry saw them as part of the growing opposition to tsardom. Second, to contend that the peasants would oppose the revolutionary intelligentsia and not the liberals and the tsar was an absurd assumption in light of the major demand of the peasants—land. Who owned the land, the workers or the liberals and the tsar? Who would the peasants rise up against, the workers or the liberals and the tsar? Kautsky agreed that the liberals had something to fear from an uprising by the peasantry, but it was loss of their land, not a split within the

revolutionary movement. Finally, Kautsky argued that the *Vorwärts* entirely missed the point of the activities in Russia if it failed to perceive that the very basis of the revolution was the need to liberate the country from its premodern forms, to distribute land to the peasantry and to establish progressive governmental institutions. In this way, Russia's politics and society would be brought into line with its emerging capitalist economics.⁸

In other words, Kautsky was arguing that the avant-garde of workers, reinforced by a rebellious peasantry, would force the revolution to its necessary historical conclusion — a capitalist, liberal Russia. In a later article, which was also the introduction to a new Russian edition of his *Das Erfurter Programm*, Kautsky expanded on this theme to predict that the temporary liberation of the peasantry that followed the acquisition of land, a concession necessary to win peasant support, would gradually be eroded as capitalism grew. Naturally his major point was that the growth of capitalism in the future depended upon the workers and peasants pushing the liberals into realizing in the present the system that would eventually give rise to the socialist revolution.⁹

Although this analysis is apparently the standard Marxist view of the course of modern history, three points of importance need to be made. First, Kautsky was in fact arguing against the application of the rigid Marxian view of the peasants as hopelessly reactionary, a view which the *Vorwärts* was accepting. While he thought a reactionary peasantry was characteristic of capitalist society, such as Germany, he did not think this was true in premodern societies, such as quasi-feudal Russia. Second, with the German model foremost in his mind, he feared that without the necessary push from the peasantry under the leadership of the proletariat, Russia's bourgeoisie would fail, as had Germany's, to eradicate all vestiges of the old order. And third, his view of the necessity of a worker-peasant coalition in 1905 corresponded very closely to the program adopted by Lenin and the Bolsheviks by 1917. Kautsky's analysis of the 1905 unrest in Russia was to provide the framework for his views of 1917.

As far as the Russian socialist movement was concerned, Kautsky publicly expressed confidence that its internal splits would not destroy its ability to take advantage of the revolutionary situation, although privately he was more pessimistic. He saw three kinds of divisions within the Russian movement: national, personal, and principled. The first included Great Russians against Caucasians; Poles and Latvians against Lithuanians; the Jewish *Bund* against them all; and the various combinations of conflicts implied by these divisions. That the groups were separate at all, said Kautsky, was largely a reflection of the

inadequacies of the Russian state and the secrecy imposed by illegality. One such national conflict captured Kautsky's special attention, namely the antagonism between the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and the Russian Marxian groups. The former argued that Polish independence was a more immediate, pressing problem than was political revolution in the entire Russian empire. Over twenty-five years earlier Kautsky and Engels had disagreed on this issue. Kautsky had argued that the political goals of socialism should overrule the desire for Polish liberation, while Engels had contended that Poland, and incidentally also Ireland, had to be independent before they could have significant socialist movements. In 1905, Kautsky and Luxemburg, to say nothing of Plekhanov and Axelrod, were inclined to agree with Kautsky's earlier view.¹⁰

When in February 1905, Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz (1872-1905), a Polish socialist and occasional contributor to the *Neue Zeit*, submitted an article calling for a separate Polish movement to break away from the larger Russian issues and seek Polish independence, Kautsky rejected the article in no uncertain terms.

I am little edified by the politics put forward by you in your article. You wrote the unbelievable sentence that Poland certainly is ripe for democracy, *but perhaps not Russia*. This statement is the worst betrayal of the Russian revolution which one can think of and simultaneously reveals the most short-sighted parochialism. The PPS seems still not to know that the history of all nations living in the Russian empire will be decided in Petersburg, not Warsaw, that the destruction of tsarism is the precondition of the independence of Poland, that today it is a question of combining all the forces of revolution against the tsar. You think [you will] be able to win Polish democracy before the Russian is won, therefore you separate the Polish revolution from the Russian, and you make a struggle of the Poles against Russians out of the struggle of the Polish and Russian proletariat against the tsar.

I cannot cooperate in that.¹¹

— After the national divisions, Kautsky discussed what he saw as essentially a personal division, that between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks, though he did not use those terms. He argued that in fact, as far as matters of principle were concerned, the Russian social democrats were more united than the German, since there were no revisionists in the Russian movement. On tactics and program, he wrote, revealing his ignorance of the true situation, the two groups did not

differ at all, but on "the best form of party organization" they could not agree. And he argued that even this difference had drifted into the background as the dispute got more bitterly personal with time. He felt that a common enemy and the overwhelming need for unity would eventually overcome what was really a petty dispute. Privately Kautsky expressed respect for Plekhanov, Axelrod, and the rest of the *Iskra* Mensheviks, but argued that both they and Lenin's Bolsheviks had become too involved in the petty quarrels that so often plagued emigrés. The biggest problem, he said, was that the leaders had lost touch not only with Russia, but with activity of any sort. Instead of organizing, both sides criticized; instead of struggling, they speculated; instead of mixing theory and practice, they were pure theoreticians. Kautsky wished a plague on both their houses and hoped for the emergence of new leadership within Russia.¹²

The third division among Russian socialists was to Kautsky the most significant. On the one side were all those groups previously discussed, Poles and Russians, Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, and the *Bund*, —that is, the social democrats—and on the other side were those who called themselves revolutionary socialists, that is, terrorists. Kautsky discussed the historical origins of the peasant-based revolutionary socialists at great length and called for firm opposition to them, totally rejecting any suggestion of unity between the two groups: The future lay with organization and propaganda, not terror and assassination. He went on to argue, very optimistically, that these many splits were blown out of proportion by the small size and clandestine nature of the Russian movement. He saw the slowness of growth as a cause rather than a consequence of disunity and predicted that success would reduce the importance of the differences. Kautsky concluded his review of Russian socialism by claiming that not it but its opponents were in chaos, a chaos that would increase with the continued upsurge of peasant activity. Other observers of the Russian socialist scene at this time were less confident that events would favor unity and victory.¹³

The Mass-Strike Issue

The questions of division within the Russian movement and the role of the peasantry in Russian revolutionary activities took on much greater importance after the fact, that is, in 1917. The major impact of the Russian revolution of 1905 on Kautsky and the SPD was the fuel it added to the political debate over the mass or general strike. Other socialist parties had employed the tactic before 1905, and in fact, in the wake of the SPD's smashing victory in the 1903 election, Rudolf Hil-

ferding, like Kautsky an Austrian-born intellectual who had attached himself to the German movement, suggested that the Germans consider the mass strike as a possible means of breaking out of the dead end of the country's pseudoparliamentary system. But prior to 1905, the German party leadership, backed by the trade-union leadership, had always managed to keep discussion of the mass strike at an absolute minimum. Even the mildly pro-mass-strike resolution at the 1904 Amsterdam congress of the Second International touched off no major polemics in the SPD. However, 1905 changed all this radically.¹⁴

What made the mass-strike debate particularly critical in Germany in 1905 was not just the Russian model, but also a major resurgence of economic strike activity by German workers. In that year more than half a million workers took part in work stoppages, either strikes or lockouts, more than in any previous five-year period. This new and extremely high level of activity had various effects on different parts of the socialist, working-class movement. The trade-union leadership, concerned with paying for strikes and conserving their jobs and their unions, tended to get increasingly cautious about calling their workers out. Since the turn of the century, powerful, wealthy, and highly conscious associations of industrialists and entrepreneurs had emerged in Germany, and they had begun to retaliate against the unions with lockouts and contributions to member firms experiencing strikes. The five-month-long lockout in the Crimmitschau-Zwickau textile industry during the winter of 1903-1904 had ended with an awesome display of power by the employers' associations and defeat for the unions. On the other hand, the strikes themselves and the increasing cost of living in 1904-1905 roused the rank and file of the trade unions to greater militancy. As one historian put it: "The same socio-economic situation which made the union leaders conservative had the opposite effect on the rank and file. The rising cost of living, the intense and widely shared experience of strike and lockout, and the unprecedented aggressiveness of the employers generated in the workers a new militancy and a receptiveness to radical political ideas."¹⁵

While these contradictory impulses were running through the trade-union movement, the SPD was experiencing internal difficulties. Traditional party superiority over the trade unions, which had in fact been weakening since the 1890s, was being seriously challenged. By 1905, the Free Trade Unions had surpassed the party in size, wealth, and probably also in organizational strength. As with nearly all trade-union movements, the German one was primarily concerned with specifically economic issues like wages, hours, and benefits and was

cautious about spending its strength in political battles. When this inclination was coupled with the increased strength of the employers, the trade-union leaders, many of whom were also prominent party figures, began to insist that the party should no longer look upon the unions as automatic organizational allies in political struggles. Recognizing the importance of the trade-union membership, the party leaders, who were themselves becoming increasingly conservative, tended to side with the trade unionists and stayed away from any suggestion that the party adopt the mass-strike tactic for political ends.¹⁶

The leadership was not the party, however, and the more radical faction within the SPD looked at the mass strike with much different eyes than did the party bureaucracy. The people of this faction were almost all intellectuals, that is, they lived by their pens, and none had institutional responsibilities either to national or local party organizations or to trade unions. Some had close ties with party newspapers, like the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, but none could be called part of the party bureaucracy. In large part this lack of responsibility, while allowing greater freedom, also meant that these intellectuals were not in regular contact with those in whose name they spoke—the workers. Kautsky, Luxemburg, Parvus, Hilferding, and the others all lacked the institutional framework that so often tempers abstraction. The radical faction of the party was also dissatisfied with the continued growth of votes and membership as ends in themselves and was anxious to see the party break out of what it felt would be the ultimately fruitless scramble for meaningless political power. Led by Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht (Wilhelm's son), this radical faction strove to vitalize the party by taking advantage of the unrest in Germany and the mass-strike tactics so impressively used by the Russian workers. They hoped to use mass action to force the Prussian state to democratize and to combat German imperialism; they also sought to expand the party's influence among youth and the military forces. All this clearly contradicted the wishes of the party and trade-union leadership, and the resulting conflict continued through the war years, ending only with the split in German socialism during World War I.¹⁷

Paradoxically, though Kautsky started out in opposition to the party leadership, especially the editorial staff of the *Vorwärts*, in the mass-strike dispute, between 1905 and 1910 he emerged as the major architect of the theory that has variously been called centrism, fatalism, or integration ideology. In fact, beginning in late 1905 and persisting through mid-1910, Kautsky was more or less out of favor with the party leadership, who objected to what they considered his overly radical posture. Yet during this time, because an articulate left wing had

emerged in 1905, he devoted himself to finding the "true" course between revisionism-reformism on the right and radicalism on the left. He was able to do this only by expanding to the fullest his rationalistic and optimistic analysis of the tensions in German society. Thus he remained out of favor with the party leadership because he insisted upon pointing out that the rigid Prussian-Junker state in Germany would not follow the wise course of compromising with the workers, but would ultimately force a resolution of societal tensions by revolution. On the other hand, he resisted what he thought were the putschist tendencies of the emerging left, reinforcing his long-standing view of the party as "revolutionary, but not revolution-making." The logic of Kautsky's analysis is hard to fault, but his rather naive faith that all would come out right in the end reflects his lack of sensitivity to the implications of the antirevolutionary organizational structure of the SPD. Furthermore, his strong humanitarianism made it difficult for him to call for revolutionary action, and therefore human destruction, unless he was certain of victory. Since revolutionary conditions are by their nature unpredictable and confusing, he never called for uncompromising revolutionary action in Germany.¹⁸

Several times before 1905 Kautsky had at least touched on the topic of the mass strike or general strike. Unlike many others in the party who dismissed it out of hand as nonsense, as had Wilhelm Liebknecht, Kautsky always considered the general strike a potentially useful weapon in the arsenal of social democracy, even if a dangerous and unpredictable one. A general strike in Belgium, which won minor concessions in easing the country's restrictive franchise law, brought the Second International to add discussion of this tactic to its agenda in 1893. For a general-strike commission at that congress, Kautsky drafted a resolution renouncing the worldwide general strike as totally impractical, but leaving open the possibility of using the general strike on a limited scale, under certain conditions. These conditions were, typically, left unspecified. Though the Zurich congress did not have time to consider the resolution, Kautsky's proposal received the approval of the commission. After the congress, he reinforced his views in letters to Engels and Adler. To the latter he wrote, "I am of the view that the strike has a great future and in the coming battle will play a great role." He argued that even if at present the general strike did not seem very likely, the party should not categorically renounce it. Rather, the general strike could serve both as a threat and a useful organizational aim. He also cautioned, however, that if the general strike ever were to be used, the party leadership would have to exercise close control in timing and execution, in order to ensure that it did not get

out of hand. He most definitely did not perceive the general strike as a spontaneous action. If it came at all, it would be the result of disciplined action and centralized control, not a primal overflow of pent-up frustration.¹⁹

In the spring of 1902 a spontaneous general strike broke out in Belgium once again. The socialists took advantage of the situation to demand further alterations in the franchise law. When the national parliament responded to intimidation in the streets by refusing to change the law, the Belgian party was forced to face defeat or push the issue to civil war: It chose the former. Franz Mehring and Rosa Luxemburg published articles in the *Neue Zeit* that criticized the Belgian leaders for calling off the strike. Victor Adler, who had been trying for some time to head off a faction in his own party that favored the general strike, chastised both Kautsky and Bebel for not attacking the position taken by Luxemburg and Mehring. Kautsky disagreed with Adler, observing, "You are shocked by Rosa and Franz, I by the Belgian leaders." He added that "this is the first time (and I hope the last time)" that he and Adler had ever so clearly disagreed.²⁰

Kautsky's grievance with the Belgians was not that they had called off the general strike, because, he said, that depended on local conditions and was endlessly debatable. Rather his complaint was that the leaders of the Belgian party had simultaneously pursued "two diametrically opposed courses." On the one hand, they had demagogically roused the masses to take to the streets demanding a general male franchise, while on the other hand they had secretly negotiated with the government for ministerial posts. Not only was this duplicitous, it showed a reckless disregard for the dangers of the general strike. In their almost grotesque eagerness to enter the government, Kautsky claimed, the Belgian socialists took their weapon too lightly; in their stupidity they toyed with "blood and lives. . . . Vandervelde and his people had no notion of the difficulties of the situation, of the seriousness of the struggle." Kautsky also noted that Singer and Bebel both agreed with this analysis.²¹

Adler's reply suggested that Kautsky, Singer, and Bebel were so upset because they thought of the Belgian leaders as revisionists. But Kautsky denied this, observing that the Belgians could not be revisionists since they had nothing to revise; they had always been eclectic and unsophisticated in theoretical matters. If prejudice of this sort were to be introduced into the discussion, said Kautsky, then what about Adler's irrational response to Luxemburg? Kautsky felt that his Austrian friend had reacted subjectively to the language of Luxemburg's article, rather than objectively to its content. According to him,

Adler failed, as had the Belgians, to realize that in Belgium patience and constant pressure would soon win the day for the socialists. "But strange to say," he added, "our *Realpolitiker* and statesmen are more impatient than our revolutionaries. They cannot wait until they become ministers, and this urgency for a ministry alone explains all the proceedings that simultaneously cheat with the liberals and incite the masses with bloated phrases."²²

Before 1905 Kautsky's major concern with respect to the SPD was still the challenge from the right. For this reason, though he was hesitant to claim the general strike as a universally applicable, ultimate weapon of the working class, he was also reluctant to renounce it as useless. In defending Luxemburg's arguments in favor of the general strike, he generalized from the specific question at hand to broader issues. He asked Adler what options remained for a party which renounced force but "parliamentary cretinism and statesmanlike cunning." The renunciation of force was, according to Kautsky, central to the conflict between "the two methods which today struggle for dominance" in the SPD: Should the party develop as an independent power capable of forcing its desires on bourgeois society? Or should its program ask only for those things which are reconcilable with the bourgeois world? Kautsky obviously favored the first position. But lest he be suspected of an overemphasis on violence, he clarified his view of force: "My inclination is to understand force [*Gewalt*] as another means of power [*Machtmittel*], . . . organization is also a means of power. Every investigation of force must be an investigation of the means of power of the proletariat. Its fists are only one of its means of power and not the decisive one. Its most important means of power is its absolute necessity economically." He recognized the inherent dangers of, and threat to human life implied by, the general strike; he objected strenuously to using this weapon frivolously. But the "infathomable future" that lay ahead demanded that the party preserve the greatest possible tactical flexibility. Just as he had earlier refused to reject ministerialism in principle, so here he refused to reject the principle of the general strike. On such questions he was far from dogmatic and unrealistic, his major concern being preparation for the unknown.²³

Few issues in the history of German social democracy before World War I more clearly illuminated the paradoxes and contradictions of the movement than did the great mass-strike debate of 1905-1906. Preoccupation with the issue began in earnest in May 1905, when, at their national congress in Cologne, the trade unions denounced not only the mass strike, but also any discussion of it. In June the radical, intellectual wing of the party launched its major response to the trade unions with

the publication of *General Strike and Social Democracy*, by the Dutch socialist Henriette Roland-Holst, with an introduction by Kautsky. For the next year and a half, and then for long after that, through numerous party congresses and tons of printed matter, all factions of the party and trade unions debated the pros and cons of the mass strike and of talking about the mass strike. They hashed over the nature of the party and of party-trade-union relations and a vast multitude of other questions. In the course of this debate the centrifugal forces at work in the SPD were revealed as never before. To the extent that the mass-strike debate brought about changes in the internal relationships of the working-class movement in the Second Reich, it was even more important than the controversy over revisionism.²⁴

This is a particularly difficult issue to deal with for many reasons. First, never before was a party debate so completely one of tone, of emphasis, rather than of substance, and never before were the arguments so obviously off the point. Second, Kautsky's position in this debate was even more severely rationalistic and finely drawn than his previous polemical postures. Third, the traditional anarchistic associations of the mass strike and the persistence of revisionists within the party meant that both sides could hurl irrelevant epithets at their opposition, thus blurring important distinctions and encouraging incorrect generalizations. Fourth, close analysis of the mass-strike debate reveals that what at the time appeared to be clear divisions between left and right, radical and moderate, were in fact overlapping and often contradictory alignments that render such labeling suspect. Finally, the issue of the mass strike was one that simply would not die, regardless of party and trade-union resolutions. Though both leadership groups made clear their hostility to the mass strike, though both organizations avoided any association with the mass strike, spontaneous mass action persisted through late 1905 and early 1906 and was to recur with discomforting frequency right up to 1914. The way in which the SPD responded to these persistent upheavals was a portent of reactions to the alarming events of 1914, 1917, and 1918.

During the course of the mass-strike debate, which for Kautsky consisted largely of an extended exchange between the editorial staffs of the *Vorwärts* and the *Neue Zeit*, he became more strongly associated with the party's radical faction than ever before. In large part this was the result of circumstances, namely the fact that the editorial board of the *Vorwärts* was dominated then by men whom Kautsky counted among the revisionists, above all Kurt Eisner and Richard Fischer. In July 1905, Kautsky called the *Vorwärts* staff "an inveterate evil." The hostility was mutual, and it tended to feed the mass-strike debate quite

independently of the substantive content of the debate. Kautsky's radical posture was further exaggerated by the nature of the coalition he opposed, especially because the *Vorwärts* editorial board sided openly and aggressively with the trade-union leaders. Like the revisionists, the trade-union leadership had long considered Kautsky the kingpin of the distrusted orthodox Marxists. The intensity of the attack by both groups, as well as the intensity of Kautsky's counterattack, reflected these perceptions. Finally, Kautsky seemed to move to the left at this time because he was so closely allied with Rosa Luxemburg, whom more conservative party and trade-union leaders considered fanatical. Though the Kautsky-Luxemburg coalition was based on shared enemies more than on shared theory, an informal mutual defense pact was in effect between the two intellectuals during the mass-strike debate. Kautsky took it upon himself to defend his friend from trade-unionist attacks while she was in Russian Poland fighting for the revolution in its own territory. Kautsky's efforts earned him even more severe attacks from the right.²⁵

Roland-Holst's *General Strike and Social Democracy* was a relatively cautious discussion of the history and potentials of the mass strike. It was not a revolutionary call for bloody action in the streets. But the editorial board of the *Vorwärts* chose to disregard the content of the book and to concentrate instead on the possible implications of a widespread mass-strike discussion. In taking this step the editors, like their allies the trade unionists, had to distort the tone of Roland-Holst's argument. At the same time they also condemned Kautsky for associating himself with the mass strike. Wrongly implying that Roland-Holst had assigned "unconditional and extraordinary significance" to the mass strike, the *Vorwärts* board argued that by so doing futile hopes would be aroused and attention and energy would be diverted from the more pressing, mundane, but also safer tasks of political and economic organization and struggle. The editors specifically rejected Kautsky's call, made in the foreword to the book, for further discussion and study of the mass strike as preparation for the future.²⁶

The editors of the *Vorwärts* did not, however, categorically reject the mass strike as a potential weapon in the political efforts of the working class. Though careful to avoid using the expression *mass strike*, adopting instead one of the several code words that emerged during the debate, *Arbeitsverweigerung* (literally, "refusal to work"), the editorial board recognized such action as a possibility and only came down strongly against discussing it. For them the mass strike was something done, perhaps, but not something that was talked about. They emphasized that the SPD was revolutionary not because it condoned

illegality and the use of force, but because its major aim was the achievement of socialism by the "revolutionization of heads," by the "conquest of the *Geist*" of the ever growing proletariat.²⁷

Rebutting the *Vorwärts* attack was not difficult for Kautsky, since he had only to point out that the editorial board had misread Roland-Holst. Far from overemphasizing the mass strike, said Kautsky, both he and his Dutch comrade simply saw it as a complement to parliamentary activities, perhaps even as a logical continuation of the more reformist activities of socialists. Kautsky opened his response with a presentation of his own analysis of the limits and nature of the mass strike that was anything but radical. Even his sharpest condemnation of the *Vorwärts* editorial board, for siding with the trade unions in calling for a ban on discussion of the mass strike, was made because without discussion of the issue, opportunities for fruitful use of the mass strike might be missed or the mass strike might be used when it should not be. The failure of the *Vorwärts* to take the lead in a thorough discussion of the mass strike, he contended, meant that those presently responsible for the policies of the official party journal were unfit for their jobs.²⁸

Kautsky's position was a curious combination of a genuinely leftist recognition of the sterility of purely parliamentary action and of a caution based on the conviction that the future belonged to socialism and on recognition of the strength of the military-bureaucratic machine that dominated Germany. Thus he argued that the growing interest in the mass strike among workers was not just the result of the Russian model, but also of a "growing disdain for parliamentarism." He saw the latter as a reaction to the failure of the SPD to bring about any changes in the wake of its smashing victory in the 1903 election, which the *Vorwärts* had loudly proclaimed as the advent of the peaceful conquest of political power by the party. When in fact nothing happened, Kautsky argued, the workers began to look elsewhere for the political strength necessary to begin the conversion to socialism. According to him, two things made it likely that this trend would continue. One was the steady decline in SPD fortunes in runoff elections, an indication of the party's increasing isolation; the other was the extent to which the Reichstag declined as a center of political activity as the SPD *Fraktion* grew. Kautsky concluded that as long as these tendencies persisted, interest among social democrats would increasingly be focused on extraparlimentary means of influencing the politics of the Reich.²⁹

This portion of Kautsky's analysis was very radical in implication, and had he limited himself to this, his identification with the radical faction of the party could be accepted without qualification. But if

attention is turned to his treatment of the specifics of the mass strike, the ambiguity of his position emerges. For he was extremely hesitant to suggest that the mass strike was a reasonable tactical consideration for the SPD. While he rejected the suggestion of some trade unionists that the mass strike *was* revolution, feeling that Belgium, Sweden, Holland, and Italy had shown otherwise, he did feel that in Germany "a successful mass strike is only conceivable in a revolutionary situation." To use the mass strike to support demands for franchise changes in a single city, like Hamburg, was foolish. He even cautioned against automatic response with the mass strike to governmental moves against the existing franchise, arguing that such moves might be intended as provocation. Kautsky's rational analysis of the potentials of the mass strike and his respect for the military and police power of the German state led him to conclude that, despite the growing popular attraction of extraparlimentary activity, the party would have to exercise great caution when contemplating the use of such a potent and dangerous weapon. In other words, he was urging discussion of the mass strike precisely because he was not eager to see it used.³⁰

Such analytical niceties played little role in the heated debate that raged from July 1905 until after the 1906 Mannheim party congress. Kautsky claimed that because the *Vorwärts* editors did not want to talk about the mass strike, they must be intent upon compromise and cooperation with the government. The *Vorwärts* editorial board denied this accusation and countered with one of their own, implying that since Kautsky wanted to talk about the mass strike he was at least inclined toward anarchism. The validity of this charge was, of course, vigorously denied by the *Neue Zeit* editor, who had himself struggled against anarchists for years. The trade unions also entered the fray with attacks on Kautsky. Because he wanted to talk about the mass strike and because he claimed that the trade unions formed an elite vested interest opposed to the rising unrest among the rank and file, the trade unionists labeled Kautsky a *Nurpolitiker*, that is, one who was only interested in the political aspects of the workers' struggle and not in the cause of economic improvement. This charge contained only a grain of truth, because Kautsky had always staunchly supported the trade unions as schools for socialists. But he had also always argued that in the party-trade-union relationship, the party had to be superior.³¹

Two party congresses, in Jena, 1905, and in Mannheim, 1906, dealt with the mass-strike issue. Together they revealed in the clearest possible terms the paradoxes of the prewar German social democratic movement. At Jena, Bebel gave one of the longest speeches in the history of the party by way of introducing his mass-strike resolution.

For three-and-a-half hours, he demonstrated his political skills, his mastery of the party idiom, and the brilliant leadership that allowed him to simultaneously praise and criticize all factions of the party. Kautsky's 1893 Zurich resolution on the mass strike was praised as a model of clarity, but his emphasis on the sterility of the 1903 electoral victory was criticized as cryptoanarchist. The trade unions were praised for their great achievements in organizing and improving the lot of the workers, but their rejection of discussion of the mass strike was condemned as an attempt to ignore unpleasant realities (*Vogelstrausspolitik*). He outlined the isolation and heroism of the party in stirring terms and on the whole emphasized the analysis of the radicals rather than the revisionists. His resolution referred to gaining and protecting general franchise rights and to the duty of the trade unionists to support social democracy, but it did not contain the words *mass strike*. In an obvious concession to the trade-union leadership, Bebel used another of the code words, *Massenarbeitseinstellung* ("mass work stoppage"); but even this was unsuccessfully opposed by the trade-union head, Karl Legien. The resolution was not a call for action, but it did imply party control of the mass strike, acceptance of the mass strike as a reasonable tactic, and party superiority over the trade unions.³²

The speeches given for and against Bebel's resolution revealed what strange bedfellows this ambiguous issue created. Eduard Bernstein, the father of revisionism, and arch-radical Rosa Luxemburg, both spoke in favor of the resolution. Karl Legien, though condemning Kautsky's apparently radical stance on the question, was insightful enough to give powerful support to the latter's notion that the mass strike in Germany demanded a revolutionary situation. Luxemburg's brief but powerful speech was perhaps the most interesting of the congress. In highly emotional terms she hailed the appearance of spontaneous protest by the workers as the salvation of the party. Social democracy, she said, had only to follow the lead of its followers to break out of the stagnant quagmire into which it had fallen. Though many other speakers, among them Bebel and the prominent reformist, Eduard David, were shocked by Luxemburg's language and emotion, they accepted her as an ally on this issue. The final vote was predictably overwhelmingly in favor, 287 to 14, and of those opposed, most were trade unionists. Kautsky did not attend the Jena congress, but in his postcongress review, he hailed this vote as a victory for the party and implicitly for himself also. In the face of the opposition of the trade-union leaders, the very deep differences between Luxemburg's pro-mass-strike posture and that of Kautsky did not come out.³³

Between the 1905 and the 1906 party congresses conditions within the German working-class movement changed drastically. Beginning in November 1905, and lasting through early 1906, spontaneous upheavals occurred in several German cities, especially in Saxony. These activities were largely undertaken by workers and were aimed at stopping the trend toward narrower franchise requirements on the provincial level. Faced with massive political strikes they could not afford to support, trade-union and party leaders signed a secret agreement in February 1906. Under the terms of the agreement, the party accepted fiscal responsibility for political strikes and agreed that the trade unions would be responsible in cases of economic strikes only. The party central committee also agreed to work against mass strikes in most instances. In one fell swoop, despite the Jena resolution and despite the decades-long tradition of party superiority over the trade unions, the backbone of any organized mass action by the SPD was broken in the vise of the vested interests of the trade unions. The party leadership's willingness to accede to the trade-union demands reflected the central committee's own aversion to mass action in the streets. After February 1906, for all practical purposes, the SPD was no longer in a position to lead an organized mass strike because its treasury, though comfortable for the needs of the party, was by no means sufficient to bear the costs of a strike by the much larger trade-union membership.³⁴

For the most part this agreement did not change the mundane aspects of the working-class movement. The trade unions continued to be closely allied with the SPD in terms of membership, voting, political sympathies, and general outlook. Trade unionists remained as prominent figures in the party, and the party still relied heavily on the trade unions as educational and propaganda outlets. But if the SPD ever had the potential to lead organized mass action, this potential was greatly reduced by the agreement, which did not remain secret for long, but was leaked by the trade-union press soon after the meeting. Furthermore, those forces within the party who opposed the more radical tactics of mass action were greatly bolstered by the agreement; it became part of the growing impulse toward conservatism, along with the increased size, bureaucratization, and electoral success. Perhaps above all, the significance of the anti-mass-strike agreement lay in its timing. Early 1906 was a period of widespread enthusiasm for extraparlimentary action; it was also a period in which the ruling class seemed to be taking up the offensive against the working class with renewed vigor. If the revolutionary social democrats responded to these stimuli by surrendering one of their most potent weapons, what prospects did the future hold? Did this not mean the victory of the

revisionists, the practical abandonment of the revolution that alone could bring socialism?

Bebel presented the mass-strike resolution once again at Mannheim, but this time his tone was much different. Besides attempting to achieve the rather remarkable feat of reconciling his Jena resolution and the February 1906 agreement, he now had to realign the majority of the party that followed him by limiting the mass strike to purely defensive purposes, that is, protecting old rights taken away in new attempts at repression. He now contended that most party members agreed that "the mass strike is not feasible without the cooperation of the trade unions," but still tried to maintain that the party had not, therefore, abandoned that tactic. He also revealed his own extremely cautious view in reporting that he had favored including in the present resolution a clause that would have required the calling of an extraordinary congress to ratify any decision of the central committee in favor of a mass strike. The rest of the leadership thought this process impractical, and it was not included in the resolution. Not surprisingly, the central committee and the trade unionists, headed by Legien, were allies at Mannheim. An amendment sponsored jointly by Legien and Bebel added to the main resolution a clause asserting that the Cologne trade-union resolution condemning the mass strike did not contradict the Jena party resolution. Despite the apparent absurdity of this clause, it passed by a vote of 323 to 62.³⁵

Luxemburg, Kautsky, and others identified with the radical faction opposed the Bebel-Legien amendment, but once again in their speeches these supposed allies revealed how far apart they really were. Kautsky proposed an amendment which was a strong verbal reassertion of the ultimate supremacy of the party over the trade unions and of the need for the trade unions to act in accordance with the principles of social democracy, that is, to subordinate themselves to the party. It did not call for organizational or procedural changes to strengthen the hand of the party, and in fact would not have altered the substance of Bebel's resolution at all. In his speech on the mass strike, Kautsky powerfully reasserted his demand for party superiority over the trade unions. Yet when Luxemburg spoke in support of Kautsky's amendment, she once again emphasized the role and potential of spontaneity. As at Jena, Kautsky and Luxemburg were allies primarily because they had the same enemies. When the radicals were outmaneuvered by the leadership, which coopted the mildest part of Kautsky's amendment, a weak call for party-trade-union cooperation, both the *Neue Zeit* editor and his more radical friend voted with the majority to pass Bebel's resolution, 386 to 5.³⁶ Therefore, by the end of the Mannheim con-

gress, the Cologne trade-union resolution condemning even discussion of the mass strike, the Jena party resolution reaffirming the mass strike as a potent weapon of the workers, and Bebel's resolution ratifying the secret agreement of February 1906 had been reconciled by democratic vote. Apparently Kautsky and other theoreticians who should have known better were not troubled by this muddle.

Theoretical Development

In the course of his discussion of the mass strike, Kautsky gave explicit form to many fundamental conceptions that formerly had only been implicit in his writings. Among the things so developed were three particularly important matters: the relative importance of political determinants, the relationship between spontaneity and objective conditions, and the nature and function of the socialist, working-class party. The first item had long been a central concern of Marxists and was important because of the apparent emphasis on the primacy of economics in Marx's own work. The second item, the relationship between subjective and objective factors, was for the most part not a major concern of most Marxists until after 1905, largely because of their concentration on organizing the workers and their rejection of the romantic and anarchistic notions of spontaneous upheaval. The final item, the nature of the party, would later become the most important single distinction between Lenin's communism and the older forms of social democracy. By clarifying his position on these matters, Kautsky gave much more precise form to his interpretation of Marxism.

Prior to the outbreak of the Russian revolution of 1905, in the wake of the Belgian general-strike discussion, Kautsky offered this analysis of revolutionary prospects among European countries: "Today, at least, an entire rank of states stands nearer the revolution than does Germany, despite the rapidity of its economic development and the growth of its social democracy. Today the German government is still the most powerful in the world." The German state had the strongest, best-disciplined army and bureaucracy, and it ruled a sober, peace-loving population with no revolutionary tradition. By contrast, Germany's neighbor to the east, though its proletariat was not fully developed, was in bad shape, economically and militarily. And Kautsky contended that everything was relative, even the revolutionary power of a class. Thus while Russia's proletariat was not far advanced, its government was weak, and therefore revolution was more likely in this backward, agrarian state than in the advanced industrial giants to the

west. He did not argue that revolution was more likely in Russia because it had somehow to catch up with the West, but solely because its government was weak. He gave primary consideration to political determinants and specifically suggested that revolution would probably not come to Germany immediately because of the strength of its government.³⁷

Not all of his opponents on the mass-strike issue in 1905-1906 accepted Kautsky's apparent radicalism. At least one right-wing party member, Friedrich Stampfer, an Austrian-born coeditor of the *Vorwärts*, upbraided Kautsky for excessive caution about using the mass strike to win franchise reform in Hamburg. He claimed that if the will were present in the masses, then the party must act with them. In fact, on this point Stampfer, Bernstein, and others of the party's right wing were closer to Luxemburg than to Kautsky. Kautsky pointed out that not will alone, but also something he called "actual conditions" determined historical development. In effect he was arguing against spontaneous mass action if it were dangerous according to rational analysis. During the debate with the *Vorwärts*, he had made the same point more elaborately. Here he quoted from a *Vorwärts* article that contended that the study of the material conditions of a revolutionary situation was "child's play, . . . but the stirring up of enthusiasm is the hardest part of political education, the decision for action perhaps the great tragic problem of world history." Though Kautsky admitted that part of his difference with the *Vorwärts* on this question was merely based on differences in perspective, he also added the following confession:

Now for us Marxists, the "stirring up of enthusiasm" was never a problem the solution of which much occupied us. We believed that sufficient enthusiasm flowed from the class struggle, in which we take part, and from the scientific investigation of the conditions and tasks of the struggle, which brought us an abundance of the most inspiring new insights, the most magnificent view of the future, the most impressive aims, that we thought a special source of enthusiasm was no longer needed. And the spread of this enthusiasm and its concentration on action through concentrating on the class struggle and through the spread of scientific enlightenment seemed to us not "the great tragic problem of history," but a very hopeful, comforting task.³⁸

This passage is worthy of closer analysis since one of the most frequent criticisms of Kautsky by his contemporaries and later scholars was that his theoretical positions, if they did not determine, at least

reinforced the "revolutionary passivism" of the prewar SPD. As has already been discussed, quietism was implicit in the deterministic aspects of Marx's work, and the positivistic influences of the late nineteenth century tended to strengthen the inclination to rely on the inexorable march of history to bring about the socialist society. But Kautsky's position was not quietistic; he urged constant, vigorous participation in various endeavors, was particularly forceful in his demands for political activity, and argued that theoretical work was an integral part of socialist practice. As the above quotation shows, he felt that theory generated motivation to such an extent that promotion of action demanded no special attention; he most certainly was not calling for a do-nothing posture. Though the effect of Kautsky's position may have been to limit the potential of the SPD as a party of aggressive action, that was not his goal. In fact, his conviction that participation in the class struggle was radicalizing led him to make some startling suggestions about how the party could overcome the stagnation that he felt had prevailed since the turn of the century.

Twice during the mass-strike debate Kautsky suggested reforms to help turn the party from inaction to a more vigorous response to the unrest of the period, and in so doing he revealed much about his conception of the nature and function of the party. In a letter of August 1905 to Adler, with whom Kautsky was most unguarded, he gave fullest vent to his critique of the party, focusing attention on the makeup and personalities of the men on the central committee. Unlike the Austrian party, which was comprised of representatives of "the three great branches of the class struggle, parliamentarism, trade unions, [and the] press," Kautsky wrote, the German party was "a mere election mechanism," that is, the leaders were drawn exclusively from the party's Reichstag representatives. Kautsky thought the central committee "a collegium of old men who have become so absorbed in bureaucracy and parliamentarism that they curse every increase of their work load." Among the central committee members, only Bebel was a "fiery spirit," and even he was aging and beginning to tire easily. However, given the developments that were to come shortly, Kautsky's recommendations for changing this state of affairs seem incredible. He suggested adding "fresh blood" to the central committee in the form of "2-3 trade unionists and 1 press man." Though he knew that many radicals felt that adding trade unionists to the central committee would be a conservatizing influence, he did not share their fears because "the party masses remain as they are [that is, radicalized], conditions take care of that, and that reacts on" the central committee. In a later *Neue Zeit* article that dealt with the same question, Kautsky specifically ar-

gued that including the trade unionists on the central committee would not conservatize that body because the radicalizing influences of the political aspect of the class struggle would overcome the conservatizing influences of the economic aspect.³⁹

Thus by the end of the mass-strike debate of 1905–1906, Kautsky had developed his mature view of the nature of German society, the role of the party, prospects for the future, and the relationship between politics and economics. It was this view that served as the basis for the emergence in 1910 of the “centrism” now most closely identified with Kautsky. He gave great prominence to political determinants in all these matters, seeing the political factor of the nature of the German state as overruling the expected effects of Germany’s status as a major industrial society and arguing that the political aspect of the class struggle was primary to the economic. At the same time, he argued that it was another political quality of the Wilhelmine Reich—the sterility of the Reichstag—that ensured the continued interest of the workers in nonparliamentary activities. This line of argument implied two things that are of major importance in evaluating Kautsky’s Marxism. First, if the workers turned to nonparliamentary actions because the state was not responsive, then it followed that in states with responsive governmental forms the workers would rely on parliamentary means to achieve their political ends. And this was precisely what he had suggested in 1898 when he pointed out the fallacies of Bernstein’s political analysis as applied to Germany. Second, the ambiguity of his position was apparent in the implicit irreconcilability of the workers to a nonrepresentative government coupled with an objective evaluation that ruled out extraparliamentary forms of action except in revolutionary situations. After 1906 Kautsky remained radical insofar as he was hostile to the established state in Germany, but he was also moderate in his rejection of voluntaristic acts on the part of socialists to create or promote revolutionary situations. His view of the party was that it was revolutionary in its opposition to the state and its aims for the future, but not “revolution-making” because aggressive action not in accordance with objective conditions (that is, the strength of the German state) would only end in disaster. He was content to rely on further development of the inherent contradictions of German society to bring about a revolutionary situation and on the traditional tactics of the SPD to prepare the workers for taking advantage of the coming revolution.⁴⁰

Private Life

Such was not the stuff of a vigorous revolutionary movement or of a fanatical revolutionary theoretician. But the SPD was not the former

and Karl Kautsky most certainly was not the latter. He was not, except in the literal sense, a bohemian; rather he led the orderly, comfortable life of a successful intellectual. Though his incredible productivity is proof of his dedication and enormous capacity for work, he was occupied not with the frenetic labor of anticipating immediate revolution but with the long and difficult process of analyzing contemporary society and educating the workers in their historic responsibilities. Once when Adler, who was constantly in fiscal straits, hinted that he was sometimes criticized by party comrades because of his concern about earning a decent living, Kautsky stoutly defended his friend's right to basic comforts: "We may not carry on in conformity with anarchistic-nihilistic methods of propaganda which contend that the revolution comes very soon and which of necessity crumbles if the revolution does not come at the expected time. Our agitation must be calculated on a long duration, we must prepare ourselves so that we are able to conduct our struggle for decades; but for that it is necessary that the pioneers have an ordered domestic existence."⁴¹

Kautsky himself led such an existence. His days were largely devoted to work and his evenings to visiting, usually at home, and light reading. From nine in the morning to one in the afternoon he devoted himself to concentrated writing. After lunch and a nap (he was quite fond of sleeping), he would usually take long walks, often with his sons, during which he apparently worked out his thoughts on the multitude of issues that concerned him. The tradition begun by Engels of Sunday afternoon gatherings was continued in the Kautsky household. The Bebels, Rudolf Hilferding, Gustav Eckstein (two Austrians and close collaborators on the *Neue Zeit*) and, until her split from Kautsky in 1910, Rosa Luxemburg, were the most frequent guests. In addition to these regulars, the affairs were almost always swollen by foreign visitors; Russians were most numerous, but Austrian, French, Dutch, Belgian, and English socialists attended as well. The family's material needs were comfortably satisfied by Karl's income from the *Neue Zeit* and the royalties from his ever increasing literary production. Though he continually complained that he wanted more free time for scholarly work, as late as 1913 the responsibilities of maintaining his family prevented him from giving up his journal. Since the turn of the century Kautsky's burden of the *Neue Zeit* had been considerably lightened by the addition of Heinrich Cunow, as editorial secretary, and Emmanuel Wurm and Gustav Eckstein, who served as coeditors. But Kautsky still took upon himself a good deal of the work and discovered that having co-workers often required that he mediate in differences of opinion.⁴²

The social life of the Kautskys was limited almost exclusively to contacts with socialists and family. More than in any other European



Karl Kautsky, 1881



Louise and Karl Kautsky, 1902



From left to right: Felix, Benedikt, and Karl, Jr., 1905

country, the political isolation of German socialists was carried over into social matters as well. While like all other people, socialists were either friendly or aloof from their neighbors, depending on personal inclinations, to a very great extent close contacts were limited by reason of societal prejudice to other socialists. This fact served to reinforce powerfully the sense of camaraderie and inner direction that came to characterize the SPD during the Wilhelmine years. The party provided a wide range of social and cultural events, such as singing and bicycling clubs, and eventually formed for its members a "state within the state" that protected the socialist workers and intellectuals from the hostilities of an enemy society. Party congresses were the focal point of much of this social aspect of SPD life, serving as an annual renewal of the bonds that held the party together. Though the congresses lasted only a few days, many socialists took advantage of the occasion to stretch out the period of pleasant contacts with good friends. Thus in 1893, Karl wrote to Luise (in English): "I am afraid I won't return home before Monday. August [Bebel] goes with me and wants to stay on Sunday somewhere on the Rhine to be merry." Furthermore, Kautsky's personal inclination to calm reflection on, and discussion of, the intricacies of the movement led him to value highly his evening visits from comrades. On one occasion, while Luise was in Vienna visiting her family, Karl reported that Bebel, Cunow, Hilferding, Eckstein, and he had spent an evening in discussion, adding in German, "es war sehr gemütlich," and then in English, "a quiet chat, just the thing I like."⁴³

Luise Kautsky was, by the early years of the century, Karl's closest and most regular critic and co-worker. According to accounts of their sons, Luise read, and sometimes transcribed, every letter, article, brochure, and book that Kautsky wrote. At particularly critical times, as during the revisionism controversy and when the split with Luxemburg was coming to a head, Kautsky relied heavily on her counsel. But she was also a socialist author and translator in her own right, and frequently urged on by Rosa Luxemburg, with whom she remained on intimate terms even after her husband and her friend had split, she contributed to German, Polish, and English journals. Clara Zetkin, for years editor of a Berlin socialist journal concerned with women's issues, was also a close friend of the Kautsky family. Zetkin, Luise, and Luxemburg met regularly to discuss party and personal matters. One particularly thorny source of disagreement between Luxemburg and Kautsky was what she called his oppression of Luise. For his part, Kautsky felt that Luxemburg was meddling in personal affairs that were none of her business. Doubtless Luxemburg, who was herself a very independent person, especially in intellectual matters, was at least

partially correct in seeing Kautsky's dominance over Luise as stifling, but interfering in the husband-wife relationship served no good end. By late 1918, Luise felt compelled by Luxemburg's increasingly radical position to break off personal contact, while apparently retaining the warmest personal regard for "Red Rosa."⁴⁴

Regular vacations were a religiously kept ritual for the major figures in German socialism, and Kautsky frequently took trips with one or another of his sons. On these excursions they saw much of southern Europe, from Lisbon to Italy, but occasionally had some trouble getting away from Germans. From Madero, Italy, Kautsky reported to Luise that their hotel was too expensive and too crowded and also that "the society is too much Berlin. I see here more Berlin people than I see in Berlin in one year." And his sons frequently wore him out on these vacations; while on this same trip with Karl, Jr., Kautsky told Luise, "I am rather tired, have made [sic] with Charley a walking tour for about two hours." The expense of such travel was sometimes too much for Kautsky. In 1910 while on vacation in Baden-Baden with his eldest son, Felix, Kautsky spent 250 marks during the first week and had to beg Luise for another 200 marks, pleading, "after a week I cry money! money!" On her vacation trips Luise usually spent time in Austria, but Karl more often went to Switzerland, at least once in the company of Rosa Luxemburg on a working vacation at Lake Geneva.⁴⁵

Of all of Kautsky's friendships within the German party, none was more important or closer than his relationship with Bebel. With a few significant exceptions, Bebel and Kautsky stood together on most issues, and Kautsky's theory frequently reinforced Bebel's party positions. Two aspects of this relationship were of great importance to Kautsky. For one thing, he usually took his lead from Bebel in day-to-day political matters. Late in 1914, after the SPD had failed to fulfill its own legacy of opposition to war, Kautsky tried to assuage his guilt for having failed to convince the party to oppose the war by reference to Bebel's absence. "The feeling depresses me not a little," Kautsky wrote to Adler, "that I must now engage in practical politics without being able to follow a leader." First he had gladly followed Engels' lead, and after 1895, Bebel's. But with the latter's death in 1913, said Kautsky, "I have lost more than a friend, I lost my strongest support in practical politics." Without Bebel, Kautsky felt uncertain, and he regretted his own confusion at the outbreak of the war. Besides offering him guidance in politics, Bebel also frequently used Kautsky's writings to bludgeon party opponents. As a result much of Kautsky's reputation as dogmatic and intolerant derived from evaluation of strong positions he had taken at Bebel's urging. This was true during the assault on

revisionism; it happened again in 1910 when Bebel urged strong language against the south Germans; in 1912 Bebel egged Kautsky on in his defense of the expulsion from the party of the extreme reformist, Gerhard Hildebrand; and for the last time, in July 1913, Bebel complained that Kautsky's attack on Franz Mehring was "not sharp enough" and specifically suggested that words like "my friend" be stricken from the article. Bebel guided and used Kautsky in part because the two men shared similar views, but also because Bebel thought Kautsky overly optimistic, tactically inept, but still a useful polemicist.⁴⁶

At least until 1910, the reputation for radicalism that developed during the mass-strike debate of 1905-1906 stuck with Kautsky. Shortly before the Reichstag election of 1907, he developed an explanation for the apparent contradiction of the materialist conception of history which the continued Junker domination of industrial Germany implied. Calling on the historical circumstance of the simultaneous emergence of working-class and bourgeois movements in Germany in 1848, Kautsky argued that the bourgeoisie failed in its historical role in Germany because it feared the workers. Furthermore, he contended that unlike the English model, where agrarian interests declined as capitalism grew, in Prussia the agrarian nobles oversaw the conversion of their own lands to capitalist production for the world market. In this way the Junkers maintained their military and government positions and at the same time preserved themselves economically, although with increasing difficulty and only with increasing state support. But the dominance of the Prussian agrarian nobility during the rise of Germany's industrial sector led to the Junkerization of the bourgeoisie, not only its commercial and industrial elements, but also its intellectual life. Thus, according to Kautsky, while in countries where the bourgeoisie had taken over the government, the typically bourgeois tactic of buying off, splitting up, and otherwise corrupting the proletariat was employed, in Germany the typically Junker tactic of brutal persecution was employed. "Nothing is more suitable," said Kautsky, "to the greater strengthening of the class consciousness of the proletariat, to arousing its revolutionary energy, to welding it together into a single strong body, than this last method." He contended that both the internal and external policies of the so-called new course were aimed at strengthening the hold of the Junkers and their bourgeois allies, while keeping the workers down. If there were any great politicians left in the German government, they would realize that the dominance of the ruling classes would be more secure the more the workers were won over. To achieve this end, he concluded, the government would have to win the support of the Center party, thus

gaining the support of the Catholic workers. Instead the government launched an offensive against the Catholics and the Social Democrats.⁴⁷

The offensive reached a climax with the Reichstag election of 1907. The increasing diplomatic isolation of Germany after the tragicomic Moroccan affair of 1905 and the Algeciras conference that followed made uneasy even those in the government who supported their irresponsible kaiser in his quixotic search for Germany's "place in the sun." Many Reichstag members were disturbed by Morocco and its aftermath, and when native revolts in the German-held territory in southwest Africa revealed the ineptitude of the colonial administration, opposition within the Reichstag, especially by the Center, threatened Chancellor von Bülow's position. In a move based on a perceptive analysis of the chauvinistic sympathies of much of the German electorate, and under pressure from the Center party, Bülow dissolved the Reichstag a year early and called on the people to support their government against the meddling of the people's representatives. Though similar calls from government heads who consider foreign policy their sacred preserve had been made before, and continue to be made even in republican nations, few such calls were as successful as Bülow's. In a highly orchestrated campaign, the governmental bloc, now joined by the formerly oppositional Progressives, launched an effective assault on the SPD, though it was less successful in its attack on public enemy number two, the Catholics, who actually gained five seats.⁴⁸

Even though the SPD managed to gain more than 200,000 votes over its 1903 total, it lost thirty-eight seats, down to forty-three from eighty-one. In thirty-five of these lost districts, the vote against the socialists by the Progressives in runoffs was critical, but other factors were also important. For instance, various government-sponsored groups worked to turn out a considerably larger number of voters in 1907 than had voted in 1903; 84.3 percent of the eligible voters, over 11.2 million, voted in 1907, as opposed to 75.8 percent, less than 9.5 million, in 1903. Inasmuch as the SPD's gain was less than 12 percent of the increase in votes (200,000 of 1.7 million), the party's problem clearly lay with the voters who turned out because of the nationalistic agitation of the progovernment forces. Because the SPD had traditionally claimed that it was at least as interested in winning votes as it was in winning mandates, the election was probably not the disaster the loss of seats made it seem. On the other hand, the reformist and revisionist forces in the party were certainly more concerned with mandates than votes, and virtually all the party leadership saw the 1907 election as a severe blow to future prospects. If nothing else, the

alliances against the SPD revealed its isolation and parliamentary vulnerability.⁴⁹

Unlike most of the party, Kautsky was not tremendously upset by the 1907 election, and given his view of the tasks and nature of the party, his position is not surprising. Though he readily admitted that the socialists had underrated the potential of the colonial-nationalist issue, he emphasized that other things had also changed between 1903 and 1907. Two years of good harvests had made many peasants less inclined to oppose the government; the increasing cost of living was being blamed by the nonproletarian classes on the success of the trade unions, and the voters took out their frustration on the ally of the unions, the SPD. Furthermore, the radical ferment of 1905–1906 and even the SPD's victory in 1903 had roused fear of the socialists. But Kautsky denied that parliamentary work was an end in itself; rather it was only one tactic in the class struggle. He claimed that while the SPD may have lost "a few hundred thousand" votes from the nonproletarian classes that had supported it in 1903, it had made an absolute gain of 200,000 votes. Putting these two figures together, he made the rather dubious claim of a gain for the SPD of some "half a million new voters in the proletariat." Thus he was able to conclude that the future was with the socialists. Not only was the party's vote continuing to grow among the workers, but the newly forged Bülow bloc would have to rely on colonial policy successes to maintain control. And pursuing such policies would only increase the size of budgets and the military, and therefore taxes; intensify the isolation of Germany and the mistrust of foreign governments; and eventually bring foreign entanglements that could lead to war. He concluded that when this happened, the SPD, as the only party of peace in the Reich, would gain from the general aversion to war. Kautsky was arguing here that "worse is better," that greater international tension, higher taxes, and larger military budgets were good for the SPD. Never before had his optimism run quite so rampant.⁵⁰

Historical and Political Writings

From early 1907 through early 1909, Kautsky was less concerned with party affairs and more occupied with his own historical research than he had been for years. His last major historical study had appeared in 1895, as part of the International Library series. This work, *The Precursors of Recent Socialism*, was later reissued as a two-volume study of the origin of communist movements associated with the Reformation. It was part of a strong Marxian tradition of investigating the

socioeconomic aspects of religious movements and more specifically of rewriting the history of the German peasant wars of the early sixteenth century. Engels wrote on the peasant wars, as did August Bebel, Wilhelm Blos, and Ernst Belfort-Bax, the latter two at least sometimes self-professed adherents of Marxism. Kautsky's contribution to this literature was well received by Engels, who claimed to have learned a great deal from it. He had in fact done much more thorough research for his study than Engels had done for his, and this despite the younger man's acute sense of insufficiency about not having access to resources like those of the British Museum. Tussy Marx was so impressed with Kautsky's work that she heaped effusive praise on it. She found reading it a "rare delight," because of his "profound knowledge" and a writing style that was "so full of verve, of living palpitating interest, that one reads it like one of Stevenson's stories of adventure." Not even Kautsky himself thought that highly of his book.⁵¹

While Kautsky's first contribution to the International Library series has not stood the test of time very well, it was an interesting attempt to achieve a number of things. First of all, as with his study of Thomas More, he hoped to establish a respectable historical pedigree for socialism by revealing precursors in the past. In this case they were the communal religious sects of the late middle ages and early modern years, like the Hussites, Taborites, and Hutterites. Though he was careful to distinguish between this communism of consumption and the modern communism of production, Kautsky managed to claim continuity of the good aspects from the former to the latter. He was even more successful at tying things like the destruction of the family to the communism of consumption while disclaiming any association along these lines with modern productive communism.

Two weaknesses frequently associated with Marxian historians were not part of Kautsky's work. First, he did not simply project the present onto the past. He recognized that the vanguard of the revolutionary movement in Germany in the early sixteenth century was the peasantry and not some imagined proletariat or preproletariat. Second, he directly addressed himself to the problem of why the Reformation had for so long seemed a purely religious matter, after he had demonstrated what he saw as its socioeconomic roots. He claimed that the more widespread, the more sweeping a social movement becomes, "the greater becomes the necessity for establishing a rational connection between its separate claims." The more the larger movement was emphasized, the more "lofty general principles" seem to be motive forces. He was not able to eliminate religious motives completely, but he did attempt to explain away their uncomfortable persistence.⁵²

One of the objections most frequently raised by contemporary critics of the study was that his contention that early Christians were primitive communists was not true. In his *Foundations of Christianity*, which first appeared in 1908, he set out to investigate the nature and origin of the faith of his culture, though it was not, of course, his faith. In so doing he reentered one of the great radical traditions of nineteenth-century German thought and in fact was reinvestigating a topic intimately associated with the origins of Marxism. But unlike the Young Hegelians and the young Marx, Kautsky was already certain that he had the tool necessary for a proper analysis of the pertinent information, namely, the materialist conception of history. Disclaiming any expertise in church or religious history, he concentrated on reviewing secondary materials and on subjecting available evidence to rational tests of internal consistency and compatibility. This work was not new scholarship; it did not present new evidence. Nonetheless, *Foundations* was the best history that Kautsky wrote—it had a bold confidence, a rational constancy, and an openness that make it readable still today.⁵³

Foundations was also history with a purpose, which Kautsky made clear in his introduction: "To bring the proletariat to social insight, to self-consciousness and political maturity" by revealing that history is determined by the socioeconomic substructure of society and not by the repressive facade of the dominant bourgeois, Christian ideology. He did this by arguing for the class nature of early Christianity, largely the doctrine of the urban poor, and by setting the rise of the faith against the backdrop of the dissolution of the Roman Empire. He recognized early Christianity as a progressive force which assisted in the transition from ancient (slave) production to feudal production. But once again he denied that the ideology was anything but "religious garb" that helped the ignorant masses cope with "social forces they did not understand and which appeared to them as sinister." This analysis was obviously intended to reinforce the Marxian notion that because "scientific socialism" provided the means by which the proletariat could overcome its ignorance, the days of religion were past.⁵⁴

In his introduction to *Foundations*, Kautsky contended that the materialist conception of history "guards us against the danger of measuring the past with the yardstick of the present," and to make this point even more plainly, he argued in the text that the difference in status and function of the ancient and modern proletariats made impossible much fruitful comparison of the two groups. But despite such denials, so much of his argument was based on parallels with modern history that his book was weakened by the very tendencies he rejected; on too

many occasions he explained the period of the rise of Christianity by reference to the French revolutions of 1789, 1848, and 1871. An even more fundamental problem, one which Kautsky shares with most materialist historians, was that the arguments, for all their neatness and consistency, were based on assumptions that were not sufficiently investigated or demonstrated as true. Very convincing points were made about the relationship between the class nature of early Christian sects and the theological differences among the sects, but he failed to offer convincing evidence that the class analysis could be substantiated. For instance, once he had asserted that the Sadducees were nobles, the Pharisees bourgeois merchants, and the Essenes the "mass of the people," he gave satisfying nontheological explanations for the hatred that divided the sects and for the differing attitudes on the question of free will. However, because he did not investigate the validity of his assumptions, though it reads easily with its modern tone, *Foundations* is today little more than an intriguing period piece and a monument to Kautsky's doctrinal commitment.⁵⁵

The relative calm of 1907-1908 was abruptly shattered in February 1909, when the central committee of the SPD refused to give its approval to a second edition of Kautsky's *The Road to Power*, which had been issued by the party's publishing house in January. The party leaders thought the work too radical. This book has frequently been described as the highest development of Kautsky's verbal radicalism, with the implication that he was radical in speech, but not in action. As a close look at the mass-strike debate has revealed, Kautsky was only apparently radical in 1905-1906 as well, since he rejected the use of the mass strike while urging discussion of it. But all this is hindsight, and in order to understand the reception afforded *The Road to Power*, the situation within the SPD in early 1909 must be understood. The years after 1906 were marked by a powerful resurgence of the right wing, a resurgence greatly stimulated by the loss of mandates in the 1907 elections. Despite being frozen out of effective parliamentary power by the Bülow bloc, the reformists and revisionists, often backed by the trade unions, tried to move the party further from its old radicalism in order to create a situation in which the socialists might gain acceptance into the dominant system. One particularly strong aspect of the right-wing revival was the increasing boldness of the south German SPD Landtag delegations in their support for provincial budgets. The national party had long had a tradition of opposing any budget that included funds for military expenditures or funds that would otherwise result in a direct or obvious strengthening of the hated state.

Though in fact this principle had often been challenged, especially in south Germany, the violators had never before been quite so bold as they became after 1906.⁵⁶

Against this backdrop Kautsky wrote his book. Actually it was an expansion of an earlier series of *Neue Zeit* articles in which he had attacked the south Germans for supporting the budgets. In the course of this earlier exchange, two major themes had emerged: (1) the place of theory in the working-class movement; and (2) the effect of the so-called positive work of the socialists, that is, the pursuit of votes, election of candidates, and support for laws to protect and improve the lot of the workers. The opinions expressed by Kautsky were not new, but they were more clearly and forcefully articulated in *The Road to Power* than they had been previously. Furthermore, he could reach a considerably larger, more variegated audience in a small book distributed by the official party publishing house than he could in the *Neue Zeit*. When the central committee saw the first edition of 5,000 copies sell out in a few weeks' time, it felt compelled to oppose reissue because of the work's exaggerated radicalism. For the first time, Kautsky felt the pressure of trying to oppose the entrenched bureaucrats who made up the central committee.⁵⁷

Why did the central committee find Kautsky's work offensive? Largely because it felt that the author had committed a tactical error by talking about the party's traditional but vague tie to revolution in the distant future. In *The Road to Power*, Kautsky had not demanded immediate action or a change of tactics, but had only reasserted the notion that the ruling powers in Germany would not allow the endless growth of the SPD and the trade unions, would not allow Germany to grow peacefully into socialism. Bebel articulated the central committee's objection in a letter to Adler: "With regard to the content of the brochure, I am of the opinion that one can think everything and also speak out in circles of trusted people, but to say it publicly is stupidity." He went on to point to the danger of feeding the opposition with extremism and claimed that "Kautsky has no feeling for such tactical questions, he gazes on the ends as if hypnotized, in all else he has no interest and no understanding." The times were hard for the politicians in the party. The loss of mandates in 1907 and the strength of the Bülow bloc created conditions that seemed ripe for renewed repression, which the party and trade-union bureaucracy feared more than anything.⁵⁸

On the other hand, there was an additional possible source for the hostility of the central committee, namely Kautsky's powerful assertion that without theory, both as a consciousness-raising tool and as a source

of direction, the mundane work of the movement would lead nowhere. This struck deeply into the heart of the growing socialist bureaucracy and attacked the basic rationale for its existence. By making this claim, Kautsky was once more inveighing against the "movement-is-everything" mentality that had emerged during the revisionism debates. His attack had three aspects. First, he scorned the party's emphasis on the "practical," which, he said, "signifies the insipid and insignificant." In order to have any coherent meaning, the practical activities of socialists had to be guided by long-term considerations, that is, by theory. Second, he claimed that the "positive work" of the party and the trade unions, far from being a reflection of the possibility of growing into socialism, was in fact a major source of continued antagonism between the bourgeois parties and the workers' party and also was the most important means of raising proletarian consciousness. And finally, he asserted that "however much the proletarian organizations grow, they will never in normal, nonrevolutionary times include the whole of the working class . . . but only an elite." This point applied not only to the trade unions, but also to the party itself. For while as much as three-fourths of the total population by its class nature could be considered a potential socialist bloc, the SPD received only about one-third of the votes cast, and less than one-fourth of all the eligible votes. The remainder of the population was "only revolutionary as a *possibility*, not a *reality*." And converting the possibility into a reality was the function of socialist propaganda, according to Kautsky.⁵⁹

This entire analysis, though Kautsky claimed otherwise, clearly diminished the significance of the political and economic organizations vis-à-vis the activities of the intellectuals in the party. That this view offended the party bureaucracy was not surprising, and Kautsky certainly thought this was the source of the central committee's opposition to the second edition of *The Road to Power*. He complained to one friend that the party leaders, even Bebel, were knuckling under out of fear: "The situation today is that the most powerful social democratic party in the world has the most servile central committee in the world." To Adler, he emphasized the internal party struggle by this reference to the central committee: "The louts want to let the intellectual feel their power, to show him that he is merely their coolie and has to submit when they command." When the central committee refused to permit a second edition, Kautsky immediately launched an attack on its right to do that. He appealed to the party's control commission; he prepared for a legal and party battle; and he went to Austria for a few days, in part to consult Adler, in part to apply pressure on the central commit-

tee by suggesting that he might leave Germany altogether. He was, in fact, prepared to stay in Austria for up to six months, and in cooperation with Adler, who disapproved of the contents of *The Road to Power*, but objected even more to the central committee's effort to repress it, made plans to have the brochure reprinted in Vienna. In the end, mainly because of Clara Zetkin's determined support for her close friend, the control commission disagreed with the central committee's decision, and the latter gave in. Bebel called Kautsky back from Vienna, and the work was reprinted with very minor alterations. It rapidly sold out second and third editions of 5,000 copies each and eventually became one of Kautsky's best selling pieces.⁶⁰

Centrism

Butting heads with the central committee did nothing to improve Kautsky's opinion of the party during the years of stagnation after 1905. He specifically identified one of the major problems within German socialism as the growth of a bureaucracy. "Incompetence and pettiness," he wrote to Adler, had cost the German party its leading role in the international movement. Kautsky had once thought the major problem was one of personnel, one that would be helped by a change in the composition of the central committee. But by 1909, he had come to realize that "the causes lie deeper." He then saw "an overgrowth of bureaucracy . . . that stifled every initiative from below." While he was not accusing the leadership of cowardice, only of over-conscientiousness, neither was he willing to urge agitation for mass action. Kautsky's conviction was that only spontaneous action could be sustained, and no amount of agitation could yield the long-term commitment necessary for revolution. On the other hand, he was convinced that the leaders of the party had to be prepared to take advantage of mass action if it were to come at the right time. However, first the trade unions and then the party had come to be led by people who were absorbed in "the administrative dealings of the enormous apparatus." Kautsky was at this time close to despair about the prospects of the German party, and once again he toyed with the idea of returning to Austria, only to be restrained again by material need and the lack of a trusted successor.⁶¹

Unfortunately, identifying the problems of the party and doing something about them were two different tasks. Though Kautsky was very good at the former, he was incapable of undertaking the latter. Through much of 1909 and into 1910, he dealt with the reformist-revisionist forces on a theoretical level, in the *Neue Zeit* and occasionally

in the *Vorwärts*, but he never even attempted internal party reforms that might have helped the party break out of its stagnation. In large part this was because he simply was not a man of action, neither a politician nor an agitator. Furthermore, his entire world view, his conviction of the inevitable decay of capitalism, and his unquenchable optimism made him fall back increasingly on the traditional tactics of the party. Thus even when his own analysis boded ill for the future of socialism in Germany, he could do little but insist that the continued growth of the movement, in membership, votes, "positive work," in all ways, had to increase the tensions of German society until something broke. Once again, his logic was not so much at fault as was his failure to perceive that even when the crisis came his party would not be prepared to do anything but drift with the tide and protect itself. When the traumatic events of 1914 and 1918 occurred, he found that the party in which he had placed his trust was sorely wanting. At least part of the responsibility for this situation must be borne by Kautsky himself, because he failed to act on his own astute diagnosis of the illnesses of the SPD.

Strangely enough, the more Kautsky's concern about internal party developments increased, the more he insisted on the validity of traditional party tactics. By 1910 this tendency, along with two changes in the larger political scene of Germany, combined to bring him to articulate the theoretical position he called "centrism." In mid-1909, the Bülow bloc collapsed when the chancellor found it impossible to win conservative support for his finance reform bill that would have shifted much of the burden of state finances to direct property taxes. The end of the bloc seemed to open up the possibility of having the SPD help channel Reich politics in a more progressive direction by cooperating with the left-liberal parties against the conservative-Junker clique. This change naturally encouraged the right wing of the party to strengthen its demands for a more active parliamentary policy. But at about the same time there was also a resurgence of popular mass action protesting the restrictive franchise of Prussia and a growing popular protest over the kaiser's irresponsible conduct of Reich foreign policy. These developments encouraged the small but highly vocal left wing of the SPD to demand that the party take the lead in the protest movements. Kautsky's response to these contradictory pressures was to draw a narrow line between right and left and then to show the party how to walk that line.⁶²

The first move came from the left, specifically from Rosa Luxemburg. Early in February 1910, the new chancellor, Bethmann Hollweg, who like all the chancellors before him was also head of the Prussian

government, proposed a franchise reform bill for Germany's largest state that would have changed nothing essential. When popular protests against the proposal broke out, Luxemburg wrote an article in which she suggested that the party take this opportunity to use street demonstrations and the mass strike to win real reform. After the *Vorwärts* refused to print her article, Luxemburg sent it to Kautsky. The *Neue Zeit* editor at first accepted the article, then later rejected it, arguing that given the unrest at the time, to print the piece would have been inflammatory and dangerous. By rejecting Luxemburg's article, and by doing it in a manner which suggested outside influence (since Kautsky had changed his mind, Luxemburg felt that he had been pressured by the central committee) and perhaps fear of prosecution, Kautsky brought on the final break between himself and his radical friend. Though their relationship had been badly strained during the previous few years, the two had managed to remain civil until early 1910. Now Luxemburg, who felt she had been grievously wronged, unleashed her nasty pen and bitter tongue to get even with Kautsky for his influence and calm. She did not, however, break with Luise, and was not above using the wife against the husband, turning a doctrinal quarrel into a vicious personal assault. The more reasonable and plodding Kautsky was in the debate, the more irrational and frenzied was Luxemburg's response. She knew that she was fighting against an opponent supported by the massive inertia of the party leadership, and her only recourse was to ever sharper attack.⁶³

For his part, Kautsky committed a serious tactical blunder, not so much by rejecting Luxemburg's article, as by taking up the polemic once the article appeared elsewhere. Of course had he not responded to Luxemburg's arguments, he would then have been even more open to charges of censorship and repression, but probably the acrimony and personal discomfort associated with such a situation would have been less than what followed from the actual debate. Furthermore, the debate itself was utterly fruitless and finally had to be abandoned altogether after becoming very awkward. Given the position of the party and trade-union leadership, which moved rightward after 1905, there was never much chance that the party would take an active role in the franchise-reform agitation. But even more, Kautsky had nothing new to say on the mass-strike issue, having said it all in 1906-1907. Once again he objected to calls for such action because the situation in the Reich at the time was not revolutionary. Once again he called for careful attention to the real situation in Germany rather than irrelevant analogies with other countries or emotional appeals that contradicted rational analysis. In the course of this debate Kautsky applied

an old label, *Ermattungsstrategie*, or "strategy of attrition," to the long-term, traditional policies he espoused for the party. Social democracy would win, he said, not by employing the shock tactics of major upheaval, but by wearing down, by outlasting the opposition. An integral part of this tactic, however, was the continued pursuit of aggressive political positions by the party. Perhaps the only things gained by this involved exchange were public clarification of Kautsky's attitude toward the mass strike and the climax of the split with Luxemburg.⁶⁴

In mid-July, the polemic with Luxemburg was interrupted when the SPD representatives in the Baden Landtag announced that they no longer felt themselves bound by the party's tradition of opposition to budget support and then voted for the state budget. Though by that time Kautsky had begun to see that the debate over the mass strike would lead nowhere, Bebel's swift and severe response to the Baden budget vote certainly encouraged a turn of the theoretical guns from the left to the right. Apparently this act by the south Germans finally broke Bebel's tolerance, because he immediately called upon Kautsky to "let the mess with Rosa go; now we have other things to do than quarrel about an unlaidd egg." He urged Kautsky to attack "sharply" against the Badenese, forcing "either acknowledgment of and submission to party decisions or withdrawal from the party." Kautsky was happy to "let the mess with Rosa go," but because the matter had become so personal, he felt the need to explain his position to Luise. He argued that everyone had grown bored with Luxemburg's arguments and that the entire party felt that "she utters the wrong word in the wrong place." He further felt justified in dropping the mass-strike debate because Luxemburg had violated party courtesy by transforming theoretical disputes into personal hostility. Comrades, said Kautsky, did not do such things. For instance, Bebel, Marx, and Engels had often had differences with Wilhelm Liebknecht, "but they considered it stupid and improper to unbraid him publicly on that account, as Rosa [has] me." Although Luxemburg tried to prolong the polemic, sending a long article to Kautsky through one of her hangers-on, Hans Diefenbach, he rejected it, explaining, "Every polemic must end sometime."⁶⁵

The conjunction of the budget vote and the mass-strike debate offered Kautsky a unique opportunity to give explicit form to the centrism that had begun to emerge after 1905. He did this in his most cleverly titled article, "Between Baden and Luxemburg," which appeared in the *Neue Zeit* number of 5 August 1910. Actually this article was part of the mass-strike debate, since the first eleven pages were devoted to a refutation of Luxemburg and the last five pages to an analysis of the prospects for mass strikes in Germany. On the latter,

Kautsky contended that mass strikes were more likely in countries without political rights for the workers, but more potent in countries with highly developed capitalist economies, and that in Germany a mass strike could not succeed unless it were a truly spontaneous phenomenon. Therefore, he concluded, the task of the party in Germany was to avoid the potential disaster of a premature or fabricated mass strike, but to be prepared to recognize and lead to victory a genuine mass strike. However, the greater significance of this article lay in its last two paragraphs. How was the party to fulfill the difficult task ahead of it?

It will march to victory between Baden and Luxemburg.

If we look at a map of the grand duchies of Baden and Luxemburg, we find that between them lies Trier, the city out of which Karl Marx came. If you go left from there, over the border, you come to Luxemburg. If you go sharply to the right, across the Rhine, you arrive at Baden. Today the situation on the map is a symbol of the situation in German social democracy.⁶⁶

As Kautsky pointed out in this article, the number of party members arguing in favor of moving toward Baden was much greater than those arguing that the party should go toward Luxemburg; he therefore felt the threat from the right to be the greater and spent most of his time during the almost exactly four years before the war attacking the right. But in so doing he was being rational without being right, for in the entire debate with Rosa Luxemburg he had failed to address himself even once to the spirit, rather than the content of her argument. Luxemburg's point, though it was not specifically articulated, was that a party that only sat and waited would not be able to act when the time came. Kautsky's rebuttal was directed at the specifics of Luxemburg's position, and his conclusions made a good deal of sense. The German government did have the strength necessary to crush anything short of a truly massive popular movement, and the number of people who had taken to the streets in the spring of 1910 was probably not sufficient to carry the day. Kautsky himself had privately expressed serious doubts about the fitness of his party to lead the masses should they ever rise up. But rather than suggest reforms, rather than support tests and probes of mass action that might have sparked the party out of its lethargy, he only girded himself for a two-front war, against both right and left. The centrism that developed as a result of this posture made sense as an analysis of the prospects for socialism in Germany only if major emotional factors were ignored. Unfortunately, the decisive

factors at the hour of crisis, in August of 1914, were to be emotional, not rational.

Emotions and overwork took their toll on Kautsky in 1910. Shortly after the Copenhagen congress of the Second International, he went to Baden-Baden for several weeks of rest and treatment at two sanatoria and did not return to Berlin until late November. Bebel was convinced that Karl's nervous breakdown was largely the result of the "struggle of souls" with Luxemburg and the "foolishly large amount of literary work" of the previous few years. Kautsky recognized these factors as causes, but also hinted at the impact of the more intimate aspects of the conflict with Luxemburg when he wrote to Luise that he was recovering slowly because "the course of neurasthenia as well as the course of true love never runs smooth." He revealed his problems with Luise and his odd ailments, humor, and English in another letter to his wife: "Its dreadfully cold and I feel icicles in the brain. I have found again the 1½ pounds of flesh I had lost last week [he had been down to 133 pounds]. And that in spite of my having paid my first weekly bill. They have charged me 9.50 [marks] per day. I am making progress and get daily more strength, was able today to make a nice walk. . . . Some warm underclothing, which I asked for a week ago, would do me good."⁶⁷ This was the second time, the first being after the dispute with Bernstein, that Kautsky had had to retire for peace and quiet after a particularly bitter confrontation with a former comrade. Perhaps because he did not engage in the public venting of his emotional distress over such polemics, because he did not turn theoretical attacks into personal attacks, Kautsky suffered seriously from such encounters.

Even if holding off the left caused Kautsky the greater anguish, he definitely perceived battling the right to be the more serious task. On at least two occasions before the outbreak of the First World War, he felt compelled to take up arms against the leftists again, once in late 1911 to rehash the question of mass action and once in mid-1914 to rehash the question of the mass strike, but mostly he concentrated on preventing the rightists from winning over the entire party. Bebel was partly responsible for this approach, but Kautsky's conviction that consciousness-raising and avoiding the pitfalls of compromise were the major tasks of socialist intellectuals was even more important. Delicately balancing between right and left was always a difficult job, but it was especially hard when his positions seemed to favor the right wing of the party. Thus in the months surrounding the election of 1912, in which the party broke with its decades-old tradition of not entering into electoral alliances, Kautsky seemed to be siding with the reformists by favoring such action. But of course he had always argued against the

"one reactionary mass" slogan and in favor of using disputes among the opposition to the advantage of the socialists. As early as the Prussian Landtag elections of 1893, he had urged the party to form such alliances. As long as doctrinal purity was preserved, as Kautsky was convinced it had been, he thought such cooperation with the enemy entirely acceptable. While the smashing success of the party in the 1912 election—it more than recouped the losses of 1907, winning 110 seats and becoming the largest party in the Reichstag—reinforced Kautsky's conviction about the validity of the old tactics, another topic had begun to cause serious breaches in the solid ranks of the SPD. This was the question of imperialism, and it involved several fundamental issues facing an oppositional party in the Wilhelmine Reich—nationalism, militarism, and eventually war.⁶⁸

Imperialism

Imperialism was one of the most complicated issues confronting socialists in the years before 1914; it was also an increasingly important matter as western Europe passed through successive crises in an atmosphere heavy with the threat of war. From the Boer and Spanish-American wars of the late nineties, through the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–1905, to the Moroccan crises of 1905–1906 and 1911, socialists, and many others in Europe, felt more and more that a major war would inevitably follow from imperialist conflicts. In general, international socialism was no more united in its view of the nature of imperialism than are present-day historians. But after 1902, with the publication of John A. Hobson's seminal work, *Imperialism*, socialists came increasingly to identify imperialism with capitalism. This tendency reached a climax for Marxists in 1917 in Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, but for German socialists before the war, the key work was Rudolf Hilferding's *Finance Capital* (1910). Kautsky's views of the nature and function of imperialism were strongly influenced by this tendency, and especially by Hilferding's study. He did not accept the identification of imperialism and capitalism, however, and he tended to emphasize its political aspects more strongly than its economic aspects.⁶⁹

In his earliest work on the colonial expansion of western European nations, Kautsky had associated such activity with commercial-capitalist interests and with land-hungry, agrarian-oriented aristocrats. In 1898, and as late as 1909, in the midst of a resurgence of expansionism, he still expressed this opinion. But at the same time he began to see imperialism as a modern phenomenon, as intimately

related to mature capitalism, rather than to the early phase of primitive capital accumulation. More importantly, he began to concentrate not on the nature and origins of imperialism, but on its effects. Kautsky was particularly concerned with three things. First, the imperial policies were popular, and the aggressive assault by the government on the SPD as unpatriotic, which reached its prewar peak in the 1907 election, forced Kautsky to deal with the political ramifications of imperialism. Second, the growing strength of the right wing within the SPD and international socialism and its demand for a socialist colonial policy brought Kautsky to reiterate his humanitarian and doctrinal objections to all colonialism. And third, the obvious relationship between constant imperialist rivalries and the seemingly endless armaments race led all socialists, including Kautsky, to discuss the imperialism-militarism-war question.⁷⁰

Kautsky saw both nationalism, in the form of hostility to other countries, and imperialism as primarily bourgeois capitalist phenomena which were used by the German government to strengthen itself vis-à-vis worker opposition, to undermine the solidarity of the working class, and to draw the middle classes into an alliance with conservative Junkers. When in 1905, Bülow contended that the SPD was unpatriotic because it criticized the government's conduct in the first Moroccan crisis, Kautsky argued that just as all classes had distinct internal policies, so they had distinct foreign policies as well. While the "possessing classes" thought of the "Fatherland [as] the embodiment of their own riches, of their own power," and gave automatic support to governmental policies, the socialists did not. The workers were not antinational, because they, too, were concerned with the prosperity and security of their country. But when nationalism meant hatred of and conflict with other countries, as it had to under competitive capitalism, the workers rejected it. Though capitalistic nationalists could accept the slogan *My Country Right or Wrong*, a social democrat had "to have enough intelligence and courage to be able to recognize when the special interests of a nation, even his own, stand in the way of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat, and to act accordingly."⁷¹

Given his career-long rejection of the "one reactionary mass" concept, Kautsky's persistent claim that some among the bourgeois classes also opposed war is not surprising. Before he had been markedly influenced by Hilferding's book, Kautsky argued that socialists might cooperate with bourgeois and petit bourgeois pacifists against the government's imperialistic, warlike policies. And even after 1910, he still insisted that there were bourgeois groups opposed to war, though

now he argued that the rest of their politics worked against their pacifistic desires. The tactic of cooperation proved to be singularly unsuccessful, however, inasmuch as even their opposition to war could not overcome the hostility of German bourgeois pacifists to the SPD. On the international level, Kautsky advised each socialist party to fight militarism and imperialism at home, arguing that attacking the policies of another country simply played into the hands of the militarists on both sides. He was particularly insistent on this point at the 1910 Copenhagen congress of the Second International, when the English socialist H. M. Hyndman asserted that as long as the German socialists could not prevent Germany from making war, which Kautsky readily admitted was impossible, the English socialists had to support increased armaments. Kautsky was convinced that this sort of fuzzy thinking vitiated the fundamental precepts of the International.⁷²

In addition to these political objections, Kautsky opposed imperialism because it was exploitative, brutalizing, and racist. The humanistic values implicit in his position formed the basis for his strenuous rejection of anything resembling a socialist colonial policy, which he thought a contradiction in terms. On this he was fully supported by Bebel, who also found the idea of socialists administering colonies an absurd one. Following publication of Kautsky's pamphlet, *Socialism and Colonial Policy* (1907), Bebel gave high praise to the author's firm stand against socialist colonialism. But his praise was primarily for the political implications of the pamphlet, and Kautsky's position far transcended politics. He was not simply taking a stand against those within the SPD, mainly revisionists like Bernstein and opportunists like Ludwig Quessel, who argued for a socialist colonial policy. Kautsky's position revealed the limits to which he was prepared to extend the determinist implications of his Marxism, but even more it revealed the very basic humanist commitment that underpinned this Marxism.⁷³

The major proponents of a socialist colonial policy used three kinds of arguments to support their demands. One was a very pragmatic and sensible suggestion that, since all colonial administrations were less than perfect, the socialists in national parliaments should work to improve conditions in the colonies. Second, carrying to an extreme the determinist implications of the dominant quasi-Marxist mode of thought, these people argued that before the colonies could become socialist, they would have to pass through the capitalist phase of economic development. This was, of course, simply the for-export version of the early deviation from Marxism that argued that the cause of socialism could best be served by promoting the development of

capitalism. Third, the proponents of a socialist colonial policy argued that the interests of the native populations of colonies could best be served by bringing them civilization in the form of the new technological advancements provided by capitalism. The major figures with whom Kautsky debated this matter were the Dutch socialist Henri van Kol, at the 1907 Stuttgart congress of the Second International, and Emile Vandervelde, the leader of the Belgian party, who presented his position in a 1909 *Neue Zeit* article. At Stuttgart, van Kol presented the majority report of the colonial commission and Kautsky spoke in favor of the minority report which much more strongly rejected the colonial concept. The minority report was accepted overwhelmingly, and Kautsky's speech was soundly cheered.⁷⁴

The most frequent objection Kautsky had to a socialist colonial policy was that all colonies were exploitative, and exploitation was exploitation whether "proclaimed openly in the name of profits or hypocritically in the name of Christ or even in the name of Karl Marx." When the imperialist frenzy of the time brought the Italian invasion of Tripoli, which many Italian socialists supported, Kautsky gave fullest vent to his disgust: "All of colonial politics rests on the conception, and is impossible without it, that the inhabitants of the noncapitalist lands are not human like we are, do not have human rights, but are inferior beings like mere animals. Humane colonial policy distinguishes itself from the ordinary only in that it demands that the human animals should be well treated, as animal protection leagues demand the same for horses and dogs." In response to Vandervelde, Kautsky claimed that far from being the advance of civilization, colonial expansion was based on the most shameless disregard for the human and property rights of the native population, and only the cultural egocentrism of the western nations made it seem otherwise. The only sort of reforms socialists should promote were those which either granted immediate freedom to the native population or were directed at increasing the power of the natives to resist foreign dominations. "Ethical speeches about culture and civilization," said Kautsky, only supported "colonial tyranny." Rarely did pre-1914 socialists hear the humanist doctrines of their cause more forcefully argued.⁷⁵

—As imperialist crises continued, a contradiction developed in Kautsky's thought. For one thing, under the influence of Hilferding's book, his attitude toward the relationship between capitalism and militaristic imperialism hardened. By 1912, he specifically rejected his turn-of-the-century position which held that the real militarists in German society were not industrial capitalists but the traditional landed aristocracy that dominated the army; he now accepted without significant

qualification the doctrine that mature capitalism necessarily implied imperialism which necessarily implied militarism. But at the same time, as the threat of war increased, his aversion to, and horror of, war increased also. Whereas in 1904 he had been able to accept war as a regrettable, but nonetheless inevitable, result of modern society, by late 1910 and early 1911, the very real threat of impending war caused him to seek means of avoiding the disaster he knew it held, especially for the workers. Whereas earlier he had scoffed at the efforts of bourgeois pacifists to restrict armaments without ending capitalism, now he argued that "the armaments race is based on economic causes, but not on economic necessity. Its discontinuance is not in the least an economic impossibility." In 1912, he urged political opposition to armaments because he no longer thought of "the armaments race and the threatening war as something inevitable, for which the ruling parties are as guiltless as bourgeois society itself." The moral convictions that had brought him to socialism in the first place resurfaced after 1911. He rejected war as an inevitable result of the capitalist system he had struggled against for so long and assigned blame to the supporters of the system he was now convinced would bring the war he dreaded. In a direct confrontation between his logical analysis and his moral commitments, his humanistic aversion to a disastrous war won out.⁷⁶

Here at last Kautsky's theory became fatalistic, because he also recognized that the party of the proletariat would not be able to prevent war. He had long accepted war as an extension of politics, and he argued that if socialists could not influence the politics that led to war, if the party could not bring reason to bear in times of peace, then the possibility of stopping war once it broke out was slim indeed. In 1905 he had rejected as impossible the stopping of a war by means of a mass strike. He argued that after war had begun the best that socialists could hope for was that a minority elite of the organized workers would respond to a call for such a strike. "The idea of a military strike," he concluded, "is therefore well meant, most noble and heroic, but an heroic folly." He was also convinced that a major European war would bring revolution, and he developed political tactics for socialists at the outbreak of a war which would be popular at the outset, but would eventually create the mass disaffection necessary for revolution. If war came, Kautsky said, then the socialists had to take the unpopular position of opposing it. This would cost the party politically in the first phase of the war, but as the conflict dragged on, more and more people would gravitate toward the socialist position. When the war finally brought the collapse of capitalist society, the socialists would have the popular backing that would allow them to lead the revolution. A

principled but unpopular stance at the beginning of war would yield fruit at the end; thus Kautsky tied the inevitable revolution to the end of the war, not its beginning, as did many leftists in the international movement.⁷⁷

This conviction, and the pragmatic demands of the immediate situation, molded Kautsky's response to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the mounting threat of war that followed. By late July 1914, Kautsky reported to Adler with regret that in Germany there were no manifestations of popular mass action against the war, but he still hoped that the conflict could be localized in the Balkan region as it had in 1912. But he was also well aware of the growing nationalistic sentiments within the SPD and wrote to Adler that if general war did break out, "we must be happy if we succeed in upholding party unity."⁷⁸

On 3 August, Kautsky was invited to attend the conference of the SPD *Fraktion* at which a decision was to be made on whether to vote for or against or to abstain when the government's request for special war credits was laid before the Reichstag on the following day. Though Kautsky was not a member of the *Fraktion*, his status as party theoretician and the respect even his party opponents had for his views earned him the right, or the burden perhaps, of attendance. The situation had changed rapidly in the previous few days. On 31 July, the party central committee had discussed whether to abstain or reject; by 2 August it was deciding between rejecting and approving. On 1 August, the right-wing members of the *Fraktion*, including Eduard David, Robert Schmidt, and Eduard Bernstein among others, had met separately and decided to vote for the credits, regardless of the official decision.⁷⁹

On 1 August, Kautsky and his closest ally on the central committee and in the *Fraktion*, Hugo Haase, had drafted a statement for the parliamentary group that was based on the assumption that it would refuse to vote for war credits. But once he discovered that even his urging to abstain would not be accepted by the *Fraktion*, Kautsky changed his tack, hoping to salvage as much fidelity to principle as possible. When appointed to a five-member committee to draft the party's official declaration, after a seventy-eight to fourteen vote had decided for credit approval, he joined with Gustav Hoch in urging that a sharp attack on the ruling classes and a clause demanding that the government renounce beforehand any annexations of territory or violations of neutrality be included in the declaration. In the final document this last effort to save face was stricken after the foreign office intervened. Kautsky had lost, and his party accepted the *Burgfrieden* ("civic truce") and made the war its own. In late November

1914, when another war credits vote came up, Kautsky once again urged that the rejected clause be included in the SPD vote statement. But after four months of war he knew that his worst fears had been realized, that the party had succumbed to the confusion and fears of the war situation. This time he knew his demand was a hopeless one, and he admitted to Adler, "I will make it merely in order to salve my conscience."⁸⁰ The SPD that Kautsky thought he had served died on 4 August 1914. The causes of death were perhaps natural, but Kautsky must share some of the blame for failing to prescribe preventive measures during the decades after 1890.